

News Release

Controlled Burning Maintains a Healthy Forest



USDA Forest Service Kisatchie National Forest

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Pineville, La. (February 24, 2014) – Local residents may see smoke in forested areas as forest managers with Kisatchie National Forest conduct controlled burns. Fire is a tool used by forest managers to achieve several goals.

Fire, has played an integral role in the growth and development of our Louisiana forests. Historically, fires burned through the forests of Louisiana on a regular basis. Fires were started naturally by lightning and by Native Americans. The longleaf pine forest is an example of an ecosystem which benefits from frequent fire.

The open park-like forest in much of Kisatchie is directly attributed to prescribed fire. As thick undergrowth increases and dead limbs, needles and brush accumulate, the potential for a disastrous wildfire increases. Controlled burns reduce dangerous forest fuels which build up over time.

Other positive effects from controlled burns include preventing the spread of forest insect pests, diseases and invasive species. Controlled burning improves the habitat for wildlife species including wild turkey, song birds and the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Controlled burning provides for a quick release of nutrients resulting in rapid growth of mineral rich wildlife forage plants.

“Here on the Kisatchie National Forest we perform controlled burns from late fall to early summer, depending on the weather,” explained Ed Bratcher, Fire, Lands and Minerals Team Leader. “Very stringent weather conditions are necessary to accomplish the controlled burn in the correct way and to avoid smoke impacts in populated areas, highways and airports.” Bratcher continues, “Safety is our top priority. We employ professional fire managers who know how and when to burn portions of the forest to achieve the desired results.” These managers utilize locally trained professional wild land firefighters and other professional crews from across the nation to accomplish the burning.

“This year we will use two helicopters, ground crews, bulldozers and wild land fire engines to accomplish our goal of burning 130,000 acres,” said Bratcher. “Typically we burn in blocks of about 1,000 acres.” Visitors and residents will see controlled burns taking place in Rapides, Grant, Vernon, Natchitoches, Winn, Claiborne and Webster parishes.

If a fire appears to be unattended, please call 911. For more information concerning the controlled burning program or other Kisatchie National Forest programs, please call Public Affairs Specialist, Amy Robertson at (318) 542-8688.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest research organization in the world.

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